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February 9, 1961

MEMORANDUM OF MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT
ON CUBA - February 8, 1961

Present: Messrs. Rusk, Berle, Mann, Bohlen, McNamara, Nitze,
Barnes, W. P. Bundy, Haydn Williams, Dulles, Bissell,
McG. Bundy

The meeting opened with an account by Mr. Bissell of the current plan for launching the troops from Guatemala. He reported that the JCS, after careful study, believed that this plan had a fair chance of success -- "success" meaning ability to survive, hold ground, and attract growing support from Cubans. At the worst, the invaders should be able to fight their way to the Escambray and go into guerrilla action. If the troops are to land in top form, the operation should not be delayed, at the longest, beyond March 31, and the decision to land for it must be made before D minus 21.

Secretary Rusk stated that without careful -- and successful -- diplomatic preparation such an operation could have grave effects upon the U. S. position in Latin America and at the U. N. Mr. Berle said that it would be impossible, as things stand now, to avoid being cast in the role of aggressor. Both Mr. Rusk and Mr. Berle believed that no present decision on the proposed invasion was necessary, but both made clear their conviction that U. S. policy should not be driven to drastic and irrevocable choice by the urgencies, however real, of a single battalion of men.

The President pressed for alternatives to a full-fledged "invasion," supported by U. S. planes, ships and supplies. While CIA doubted that other really satisfactory uses of the troops in Guatemala could be found, it was agreed that the matter should be carefully studied. Could not such a force be landed gradually and quietly and make its first major military efforts from the mountains -- then taking shape as a Cuban force within Cuba, not as an invasion force sent by the Yankees?

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The State Department envisioned a long and complex effort to win support and understanding -- from other American States for a strong line against Castro -- the Dominican Republic thrown in. Mr. Berle believed that the President's own authority and leadership would be needed in making the U. S. view understood both at home and abroad. The President asked that the State Department prepare a clear statement of the course it would recommend, and meanwhile he urged all concerned to seek for ways in which the Administration would make it clear to Latin Americans that it stands squarely for reform and progress in the Americas.

The only new action authorized at the meeting was the organization of a small junta of anti-Castro Cuban leaders, to be supported by a larger Revolutionary Council. This junta will have a strong left-of-center balance, and it will be a response to the urgent demands of the troops in Guatemala for a sense of political direction and purpose. Its members will be selected for their ability, among other things, to join the landing force.

McG. Bundy

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